(b) the charges of money orders are Re.1/- for Rs. 20/- and part thereof. Money is paid at the address of the payee and the payee does not pay any other charges for this. On the other hand, draft usually has minimum charges of Rs. 25/-. In addition, a remitter has to spend money on postage for its trasmission also. Moreover, a payee has to attend a bank for collecting payment. The money order service meets customer's needs of delivery at his doorsteps.

(c) There is no competition between money order and draft as the two serve different requirement. Money Order conveys cash with the facility of home delivery and message conveying purpose and use of money sent.

(d) and (e) Do not arise in view of (a) to (c) above.

In-accessibility of computers to rural areas

915. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that representations have been made over the high cost of computer in the country;

(b) whether it is a fact that noted organization like the Forum on Social Justice have continuously demanded that Government address the in-accessibility of computers to rural areas and poor sections;

(c) whether by any meeting Government was called to discuss this issue; and

(d) if not, the steps proposed to address issues raised on this subject of high-cost computers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (d) It is a fact that the high cost of computers in relation to the per capita income is a barrier to the spread of Information Technology in rural areas and among the poorer sections of the society. This has also been a cause of concern for the civil society and the issue has been discussed in a number of national and international fora.

The incidence of customs and excise duties on computers and their inputs as well as capital goods used in the manufacture of components has progressively been reduced in order to bring down the prices of computers.

The promotional measures taken by the Government to expand the IT infrastructure and improve computer penetration have helped in extending the reach of Information Technology. Further, the Government has taken special steps to establish Community Information Centres in 487 Blocks of North-Eastern States and Sikkim and 139 Blocks of Jammu and Kashmir to provide connectivity and a range of Government to citizen services to rural population.

The Government has also sponsored projects for development of technology solutions to rural area specific problems, which impede the proliferation of Information Technology.

Decline in the use of post offices

916. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have noted the decline in the use of post offices by the public;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that in cities like Mumbai and Delhi there has been steep decline in the number of postal articles handled in the year 2003-04 by the postal department;

(c) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(d) whether there is a proposal to make better commercial use of the space occupied by post offices; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Post offices have wide range of services. There is continuous growth